

The Plain Truth,

OR,

A Lenitive for the

CLERGY.

By one *Pantophilus*.

IT is manifest that we in this Nation are in a disquiet, and in an uncomfortable posture. Now as it behoves every man to have a well-grounded calmness in his own breast; so we ought, by all good means, to promote it in the Church of God where we live: If I had not a true Desire to further this, I had never set Pen to Paper this way. But having lookt upon most of the Books and Pamphlets, that have been sent abroad for these several years, especially since the Press was at liberty, such I mean as concern Religion, I have with Grief observ'd a Fatal Ferment in most of them; The Wise God having seem'd to leave us to our selves, foolishly to ruine one another. Each Book and Pamphlet being pregnant with preternatural heat against the Opposite Party; each Company and Discourse imploy'd in unkind reflections upon others: yea, matters are come to that pass, that even among the Clergy, it is rare to see the Gown and Cloak walk or sit easily together; and which is worst of all, the Pulpit is abus'd by some on all sides to cast Oyl into this woful Flame. I have made it my Prayer, that the God of Love and Peace would calm this Fury; and in my converse have constantly endeavor'd it; and finding this Feaver still to continue, resolv'd to deliver my Thoughts in Writing to the same end, with all serious plainness.

The Parties disagreeing in Religion in this Kingdom may be reduc'd to four heads.

1. There is the Established Church, consisting of the Clergy and Laity that approve of full Conformity in the Rites and Discipline setled by the Laws of the Land.

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2. There are the Papists, who differ from this Church in many great Doctrins, in many material points of Worship, and with an inveterate enmity. These are the most formidable Enemies to the Church aforesaid; partly by reason of their Forreign Alliances and Dependencies, and partly by the encouragement they have from a Presumptive Heir. And they are the most irreconcilable also, partly by reason of their avowed Principle, *That their Church cannot erre*, and consequently are fully concluded against any Reformation in it; and partly by their constant practice of Equivocations and Dispensations, which renders it impossible to trust them. And therefore these Essays pretend not to include them.

3. There are the *Non-conformists strictly so called*; which are those of the Clergy and Laity, that agreeing with the Established Church in the substance of Doctrine and Worship, yet differ in the Rites or Manner of worship and in Discipline. And under this Head may be rank'd those called *Presbyterians, Independents* and meer *Anabaptists*. Now these being so neerly Allied to the Establish'd Church, might expect far other treatment from them than the Papists; but that there fell out some years since, a Civil War in the Kingdom, wherein these two parties prov'd opposite to one another, and the former were vanquish'd by the latter. And this I conceive hath heightned the Enmity far above the matter of their Reall Difference, this Party in Religion, though doubtless they could be glad to have their way, yea each one their own way settled; yet they could be contented (some rash and furious Persons excepted, whereof there are some in all parties) to be safely United with the Established Church, or quietly suffered in their own practice. Neither have they any Forreign Dependencies, nor any Principles that lead them to Sedition, as appears by their quietness under great provocations, while the other sort, the Papists, cannot be quiet, when no body troubles them.

4. There are others amongst us, different from all the former; such are *Atheists, Socinians, Pelagians, Quakers, Ranters, Fifth-Monarchists* and other Hereticks; now these though their Principles are pernicious to themselves and others, and therefore fit it were, some Course were taken to convince them or restrain them; yet they have no Forreign Helps or Confederacies to create much danger to our Publick Peace. But these are so greatly opposite, either to the Established Doctrine, or Substantial Worship, that as there is no likelihood of their Union, so these Papers are not concern'd further with them. So that this Indeavour is intended chiefly for the First and Third sort, which are neereft akin.

And to bring down the matter to our present Case, it is found out, by Our King, Parliaments, Judges, &c. That there hath been, and yet there is an Hellish Plot amongst these Papists, to destroy his Majesty, to overthrow the Protestant Religion with all that profess it in the Kingdom, and to set up Popery. Immediately upon this Alarm,

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as the Civill Magistrates were trying the Criminals, so the Clergy both the Conformists and the Nonconformists directed their Discourses to expose that Treacherous and Bloody Religion, and to establish the people in our own. And being both justly bent against the Common Enemy, there appeared some more mutuall kindness towards one another than before; and some lovers of Peace, that mourn'd for the loss of that Hopefull Juncture in 1660, when most Mens Minds were very prone to Unity; and also the loss of that other in 1665 and 1666 when the Plague and Fire had softened our Spirits; They did now in 1678 renew their hopes, that this common danger would greatly tend to the healing of our Divisions, when on a sudden in 1679 without any known Occasion the Publick Clergy begin to abate their keenness against the Papists, and instead thereof fall to batter the Non-conformists from Prefs and Pulpit; and would pretend that there is more danger from Separation, than from Popery: and some of them, I hope it is the weakest of them, fear not to profess, they would rather be Papists than Presbyterians; which I am very certain, no true Protestant will say, except he be blinded with Malice or Ignorance. And on the other side, many Censorious Non-conformists put the worst interpretation on this carriage, and suspect their opposites inclinable to Popery it self; they do not say indeed as the former, that they had rather be of the Church of *Rome*, than of the Church of *England*; but they know well enough, that neither of them must expect that quarter from the Papists, which they have found from one another: but yet they exceed the Bounds of Charity in their harsh Reflections. And thus they stand pelting at one another in an uncomfortable and ominous manner, while their Common Enemy is ready to swallow both, and what honest heart can be Spectator of these things without Grief and Astonishment.

Now if the Discovery of the Cause of a Disease be any step to the cure of it, I verily believe that want of *Christian Love* or *Charity* is the Reall Cause of this fermentation. This hath been at the Root of these miscarriages all along, though something else concur's therewith to produce the present paroxysm. It cannot be denied, that these have been mutual provocations given; one party hath been moved to see their Freehold and Opportunities of Service therewith, taken from them (in their Judgments) without cause, and contrary to those Assurances given them, which they thought might be relyed on, and to see their Brethren possessing them without Remorse or Pity: and then to find themselves expos'd, reproach'd, prosecuted, imprison'd and undone; and this very much by the instigation of the Governing and other Clergy. The other party offended with the preaching of the Non-conformists and many peoples Respects unto them, and with the sharp Reflections of some among them. But now Christian Love might have prevented or abated much of this, and so it hath, with many wise and charitable persons of either party.

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Certain it is, that while we are in this imperfect state we shall not all see with the same clearness, and perhaps there are no two persons in the World, that have the same sentiments in every thing; much less can it be expected in points now controverted amongst us. Each party professeth that they proceed sincerely according to their best Understanding, the one in conformity, the other in Non-conformity, must the one be judged now to comply, or the other to dissent against his conscience? God forbid. Now here comes in the Use of Christian Love, which when it is once rooted in the Heart, it will incline the Governours of the Church so to calculate their Laws, Injunctions and Impositions about things indifferent, as may be easy and not grate upon Mens Consciences. It is Paternal Love that induces many a Wise Father to abate his weak or sickly children in many matters, which otherwise he might reasonably require of them, and to connive at many of their lesser Faults; and such kind of Love, the Governours of the Church should bear to all that are under them. And it is not only Charity but Prudence, For these cannot chuse but know and see, that violent courses never beget any kindly compliance, and that all their severities have exasperated far more than they have reclaimed, and the same charity should teach the Non-conformists not to envy their honours or profits; and also to think that the imposers did judge the foresaid Rites &c. to be most usefull for the common good. For *Charity hopeth all things possible, believeth all things credible, and beareth all things tolerable; Charity thinketh no evil.*

But to come to the inferiour Clergy; without doubt the great Zeal we should burn with, should be of saving mens Souls: and in order therunto that we open to them the Necessary Mysteries of the Christian Religion, that we urge them to Repentance towards God and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that we disgrace ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and that we promote Sobriety, Righteousness and Godliness with all our power, in a word, all our Sermons should be a kind of commentary on Our Lords Prayer, the Commandments and the Creed; but alas! how many of each party, imploy their time and parts in debating, confuting, exposing and condemning their opposites in point of Rites and ceremonies, each party charging the other with debauching their consciences for the sake of Reputation or Lucre, which is the most Malicious Accusation that can be invented in the case. What is it, but want of Christian Love that prompts to this proceeding; what else should bewitch those men, that agree in the Doctrine of the Divine Existence against Atheists, in the Doctrine of our Saviours Person and Natures against Arrians, Socinians and others, in the Doctrine of Gods Grace against the *Pelagians*, that agree together in Doctrine and Worship against the Papists, and in all other Doctrines and Duties that are necessary to Salvation; and yet, as if we were possessed with a Spirit of Opposition, we let all these things be silent, and still in our Discourses and in our converse we begin at the wrong end, and presently enter into debate about Ceremonies and Government

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Government, there can scarce a company of Conformists be met together, that can find any subject to inlarge upon, but about the Non-conformists; and much alike is it with many of the other party; and if men did observe themselves well, such converse concerning one another is seldom manag'd without breach of Charity; wresting the sayings and putting the worse Construction on the Actions, if not plain bearing false witness against each other. Now Christian Love teaches quite other things; it inclines the Mind to think the best of every body, to interpret doubtful words or actions in the very best sense they can admit, to speak of others most favourably, and in short to love every one good or bad, as our selves.

The cry for Unity and Uniformity is very great; the meaning whereof is only this, you must renounce all your Principles and Practises that are repugnant to ours, that we may be one, and this is prest from our present danger from our common enemy; but can any danger excuse a man in doing what his Soul tells him is a Sin? the least evill of Sin (whether so really, or only so in my judgment, all is one to me) is not to be done: to prevent the greatest penall evil in the World. Would not Riches and Honour have tempted them? would not Reproach and Poverty have urged them all this while, to abandon their uncomfortable opinions, if they could have done it honestly; if they could have plaid the Hypocrites, which yet is the Sin they are often charg'd with, they would surely have wink'd and swallow'd what is required of them before this day.

But now, if in stead of this Unity, or rather as the proper way to it, we would pray for the Resurrection of Christian Love, and sincerely indeavour the practise and expression of it. If we would begin to think, and to speak kindly of and to one another; if we would vindicate one another as far as we can, and by our Councell and Example teach our Friends and hearers to do the like, we should insensibly come nearer together, and with calmness and friendship discourse our selves into some Tolerable Unity. For it is most plain, that our differences are swell'd with the Animosity of either party; there being among both of them more material points than these wherein they differ from one another, but Love covers a multitude of Sins.

Let us then inlarge our Charity; let us reckon there may be and are many Upright and Holy Christians on either side, and those whom we shall for ever imbrace in the world to come; let us visit one another and freely converse of those great things wherein we are fully agreed; let us seriously contrive how to promote reall Piety, and how to withstand our implacable Enemies; let us not bite and devour one another, lest we be devoured one with another.

It is a vain thing to say, it is not fit that the Established Church who are in Power, Possession and Authority should bow to their Inferiours, who should rather yield to them; for the things that have occasioned this sad breach, are in the judgment of the imposers, *indifferent* whether used or not, before the imposition of them; and they know that the Church of Christ did, and may subsist well enough without them; but now in the judgment of the Dissenters, they are sinfull, and they do unfeignedly conclude them such to themselves, according to their best understanding. And now, which party is fit to relent, or can abate, judge you; are not Kings in supreme Power and Authority? yet how many Princes have stoopt something for the Repose of their People; our Church claims no infallibility, why may she not therefore open her Bosom to so many Protestants, as well as formerly she did, in her Liturgy and Ceremonies to win the Papists. And certainly such condescension would come better from the Church Rulers and by their mediation, than from the Secular Power, and would be the likeliest means to heal a Distracted Nation.

And of this they may find the best examples, to wit of the Apostles themselves, who being Governours in the Church, though they expressed themselves severely, against such as impos'd either their false Doctrines or unnecessary Rites upon others, yet we shall find them gently treating and condescending to Honest Christians, that were found in the main, though unsatisfied in other points; I hear men still crying out, 'tis nothing but Obstinacy and Humour — those that Dissent ought and might satisfy themselves and submit; but might not the Apostle *Paul* have replied so on them, that observed days and durst eat only Herbs, they may if they will be satisfied of their Liberty, and abandon their conceit, that so much troubles the Church — But considering, that they did eat and did observe days to the Lord, he rather adviseth to a mutual forbearance, by the exercise of Christian Charity and Love.

But the common objection remains, the Rulers in the Church know not what will satisfy; or at least, what concessions are likely to gratifie any considerable numbers; and perhaps the Non-conformists have been too shy in making proposals; for, I think, it is better to erre in too much plainness and openness, than in too much caution and prudence. But alas! These Rulers know well enough, where the Dissenters are prick'd; they know, that if the Orders conferr'd in the late times were made valid, when many a good Scholler was educated in a disadvantageous Opinion of Episcopacy, and knew not where any one Bishop was in the Nation to apply themselves unto, how many this would bring into the Established Church. That, if the Declaration about the Covenant were abated; their declaring their assent and consent forborn; no other Subscription required, save to the Doctrinal Part of the Nine and Thirty Articles; no Oaths impos'd, but of Allegiance and Supremacy; the Liturgy only recommended, and the Ceremonies left indifferent; how many

ny would these few concessions be likely to prevail with. But then if withall, the Inferiour Clergy were intrusted with some measure of Authority, so far as is necessary for the Honour of Gods Ordinances and Good of the People; if serious and constant Preaching and Catechizing were more encouraged; if it were evident, that the Reverend Bishops did sincerely imbrace and countenance the most Learned, Holy and Industrious of the Clergy and Laity in their Diocesses; this would intirely win the Hearts of all Honest Men, and reduce those who have been exasperated, and violently driven into some practises that seem inconsistent with their old Principles. For Mans Nature is so molded, that Love and Kindness have the most powerfull operations upon it; and a courteous expression will make the Sword fall out of a mans hand, who in heat of opposition would rather dye than yield.

However if this Blessing be too great and good for us, this I abide by, that during our sad distances in these matters, we are all bound by the Royal Law of Christ, to love one another sincerely, and in all occasions to express the same; and I purposely repeat it, to think of each others Persons and Actions with charity, to speak of them with charity, and to Act accordingly towards one another in every instance with charity. But you will say, our charity must not be blind; we must not call evill good, and good evill; I grant this, but withall I averr, that Charity is not severe, is not censorious, is dim-sighted in the faults of others, and curious in our own: do but put the best construction on each others words and actions, and maintain the most favourable opinion of each others Persons and Designs, and this will create the sweetest calm in your own Souls, and insensibly tend to our Peace and Union; and without this, let us be never so Orthodox, never so Zealous, never so high or low; never so Dignified or so Oppressed, we want one of the greatest Excellencies of God, one of the greatest Accomplishments of Men, one of the greatest Graces of Christians, for when once our inveterate disease hath spent it self, and that we are once wearied with our straglings, and come to a consistencie of mind; we shall see that we can never be safe or happy, till by all possible Abatement on the one hand, and all possible compliance on the other, we be firmly link't together in one Soul, and one Body. God of his great Mercy pour down the Spirit of Humility, Sanctity and Charity into all our Hearts! *Amen, Amen.*

March 4. 16⁸⁰₈₁.

L O N D O N.

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